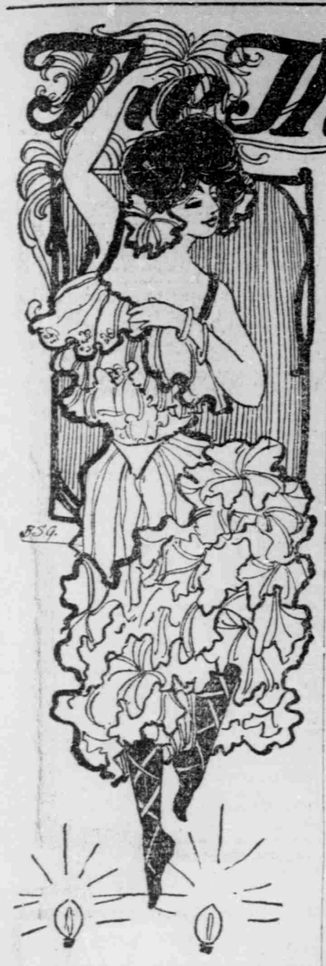
The Theatre



THIS WEEK AT THE THEATRES

- Salt Lake—Tuesday and Wednesday and Wednesday matinee, "The Honeymooners;" Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Saturday matinee, "Ben Hur."
- Colonial—All week, beginning tonight, matinees Wednesday and Saturday, "On Parole."
- Orpheum—All week, beginning tonight, matinees daily, vaudeville.
- Grand—First half of week, beginning tonight, matinee Wednesday, "Roanoke," last half of week, matinee Saturday, "The Avenger."
- New Lyric—All week, matinees daily, the cameraphone.

BY FRANKLIN FYLES.

New York, Dec. 4.—Two plays smear Broadway stages with blood and two let laughter loose. Edith Wynne Matthison and Mimi Aguglia are grewsome. Fritzi Scheff and Anna Held are blithesome.

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Let us laugh last and weep first. "The Winterfeast" is so grim a tragedy that ten of its men, all it has save two, are stabbed to death and a woman dies of heartbreak. This tragedy with such an abnormally high deathrate is of Iceland ages ago. Its Thorkel is a fierce old Viking, ashamed of his son Valbrand for writing with the pen of a bard rather than, like his foster brother, Bjorn, fighting with the sword of a warrior. The young man loved Herdisa, but the poet would have wooed in vain if, through a lie, she had not been made to believe that the warrior scorned her love. During twenty years she was Valbrand's wife and Bjorn was thought to have been killed by Indians while exploring America; but the absentee returned, and Herdisa learned how she had been deceived. Then the bloodshed set in. Old Thorkel put on his horned cap of valor, shouldered his long sword, went out for vengeance on a hateful priest, who had let Herdisa know the truth, and soon came back to tell that he had slain his enemy's seven brawny sons in fair combats. Thorkel, with head built up by a false forehead and a shaggy wig, with heels three inches high on his boots, and with a voice so big that it might have served as a sea trumpet in his stormy voyagings, looked and sounded ferocious enough to turn off a job of slaughter like that.

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There are two ways to look at "The Winterfeast"—appreciatively and disdisparagingly. It is one of six dramas which Charles Rann Kennedy, unable to stage in his native England, brought along when he came to America with his wife, Edith Wynne Matthison, to act in the old morality play of "Everyman." A Brooklyn Irishman, Walter Hampden, who had become a thoroughly English actor, but retained a hustling Americanism, induced Henry Miller with argument and money to produce one of those pieces, "The Servant in the House." In that daringly religious drama Hampden personated Christ reincarnated as a butler in a manner so reverent that church people generally were pleased. Mrs. Matthison-Kennedy accepted an unpleasant role then with a promise of the Icelandic wife if "The Winterfeast" should follow. She had worked on Shakespearean, Ibsenian, Greek-tragic and other upper dramatic planes, and was eager to go to the Icelandic.

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Four actresses are named above as being here this week with new plays. Clear ideas of their endeavors may be given by describing their best four scenes. The Iceland wife, Herdisa, has a savage nature. Mistakenly hating Bjorn for his supposed flouting of her passion, she demands of her unloved but loving husband, Valbrand, that he kill his foster brother. The combat is fought on a brige in a storm, and word comes to her that not Bjorn's pierced body, but Valbrand's, is thrown into the icy stream to be carried out to sea. Her distress is wild, but not boisterous, and I don't know an American actress capable of showing such a long-ago, faraway, barbaric sort of despair. Olaf, a young son of Bjorn, is an acceptable wooer of her young daughter; yet in her savagery she makes him take an oath to slay an unnamed man who has traduced her; nor will she, when he learns that this man is his own father, release him from his solemn vow of assassination; so Olaf goes into an adjoining room and dies on his own sword. Next, Valbrand comes back alive, to report his killing of Bjorn; and, on witnessing his daughter's insane grief at her lover's suicide, dashes out of the house to kill himself rather than live with such a wife and mother. Thus Herdisa has, without herself striking a blow, killed three men and crazed her daughter. She lays her head in her arms on a table, and when her face is lifted to the light, the ghastliness of death from horror is on its distorted features.

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A palpably brainy audience crowded a theatre at the beginning of "The Winterfeast's" initial presentation; and for an hour was delighted altogether by the skilled speaking of Mrs. Matthison, Arthur Lewis, Frank Mills, Robert Cummings and Walter Hampden. If you need blank verse elocutionists you can't do better than hire them. They will be freed from their present job soon. A second hour tired the listeners with their loquacity, a third hour brought bored fatigue and many quit the house before the additional half hour, and at the end the second of the two views I have mentioned was the prevailing one. The fare at "The Winterfeast" was not so deadly to the people in the auditorium as to the characters on the stage, but scarcely less cloying with its gore. Mr. Kennedy strides bravely away from beaten paths and endeavors to break his way to dramatic heights. His purposes, conceptions, ideals are high, and his struggle to achieve them is arduous; but there is no genius in his composition, nor much more than ordinary accomplishment. His diction is not nearly good enough to serve his ambitious scheme. That is the prevailing view of this remarkable play.

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Mimi Aguglia, the wild young Sicilian actress, is a provoker of bloodshed this week in the familiar "Cavaleria Rusticana" not only, but in "I Carbunara," a short tragedy of gore newly clotted here; but no more than in "The Winterfeast" was I permitted to see her husband and her lover fight with axes. She isn't in the least wicked, but when the lover is likely to be caught pestering her she hides him in her bedroom. That looks bad to her brother-in-law, who wants to kiss her on his own account, and betrays her to the husband when she won't let him. Then the husband hands an axe to the lover, takes another himself and they go out to fight a duel. She shows a deal of her own agony, but the chopping of the lover to death isn't seen. Couldn't an illusion be contrived to show that duel? It would draw. And I'm not sure but a Sicilian actor could be spared at each performance, if only Aguglia be saved to us.

Fritzi Frisky Scheff and Anna Hades Held. The interpolations are not impertinent. When Fritzi was in grand opera, she liked the nickname of Little Devil. When Anna was about to make a debut, posters said "Go to Held." The impishness of these ladies is professional, of course, and not at all personal. Fritzi divorced her husband, not he her, and now she is the new bride of John Fox, jr., the Kentucky novelist. Anna has been the wife of Florenz Ziegfeld, jr., ever since he began to make stage shows for her. It is said that Fox is writing a dramatic play for his bride, but she will stay a while in musical jollity. Both Fritzi Scheff-Fox and Anna Held-Ziegfeld are bright-faced, smart formed young women, with that foreign soubrette chic which no American actress has more than imitated. One of their merits is the fault of their bad English. Fritzi from Berlin speaks with a German accent, and Anna from Paris with a French one; they would lose value if they were to get our lingo pat; and most positively they must not put any fat on their present curves. They must keep their deviltry physically delicate and not broaden their humor visibly. However, don't worry. The $50,000 or so put into a new play for each looks like a safe investment.

The salient thing by Anna Held in "Miss Innocence," it seems to me, is her travesty of the title. She purports to be a pupil at a school seciuded on an island in the Mediterranean sea. Men are shooed off and Anna, having been there since babyhood, has never seen one of them. Maidenly innocence through absolute ignorance is timeworn from stage repetition. Not longer than two or three years ago, a mite of a Marguerite Clarke was such an unknowing creature with De Wolff Hopper in an extravaganza; but have you ever seen what a phenomenon of unsophistication Marguerite looks to be? If so, set her up in your mind for contrast, as you recall Anna asking you to come and play with her, or telling you that she can't make her eyes behave. The academy's grounds are thronged by school girls in white frocks on graduation day. Anna comes among them and soon is left alone to be intruded on by the Charles Bigelow of hair minus and nose plus. She asks in wonder what he is. A man, he says. He holds her hand, encircles her waist, kisses her mouth, and she inquires why he does such things; also, why she likes them with her eyes shut better than when she looks at him.

The Lawrence D'Orsay, who doesn't have to make up for a handsome English swell, nor increase his drawl or crawl, is the second intruder. Anna exclaims that if Bigelow was a man, D'Orsay isn't. The same sort of thing couldn't be so different. She is patted and hugged by D'Orsay, like Bigelow, but as to kissing her, he won't do that, because it seems too much like taking candy from a child. Now, all this while, Anna's eyes are misbehaving, and she is tempting the fellows to play with her; and when they grow fond she says to the audience in a song, "Please tell me what they mean," and in another, "I want to be naughty." I don't believe there is any actress more amusing to some folks, or less to others, than this same Anna Held; and to another portion of the public she is piquant, unique, audacious, a curiosity, neither liked nor disliked. In her present assumption of a know-nothing girly, this woman with a know-all aspect is a rather funny little joke.

Anna and some of her schoolmates go to Paris for a vacation. So does the schoolmistress, whom Emma Janvier makes the usual man-grabber. The stage is set spaciously for the Abbaye, one of the newer Parisian resorts of past-midnight gaiety. Anna Held's opening nights in New York are society functions; oh, my, yes; quite as much as the big occasions at grand opera—with certain differences, for, although double lines of carriages reached around the block at "Miss Innocence," the rise into the Smart Set wasn't higher than the sink was low into the Swift Set. What I mean is, that the theatre was crowded to excess by men with women who wore the costliest of clothes, and the assemblage as a whole was representative of Gotham's very liveliest life all alive.

As each relay of chorus girls entered the Abbaye, headed by several beauties of the show girl grade, the leaders were recognized and vigorously applauded by their acquaintances out in front. These celebrities were gowned and jeweled extravagantly. Some of the stage pictures might have been photographed from mansion dinners, receptions or balls of Fifth avenue, so far as the shapes and textures of apparel went. Mixed in with the quite correct clothes were exaggerations of sheath gowns so snug of skirts that, when one tall, slim wearer toppled over, she had to be lifted to her feet. In this stageful, Anna Held contrived to keep her small self distinct by dressing not fashionably, but in a quaint style of her own. Clever woman, Anna, whatever you may say.

The part of "Miss Innocence" at the Abbaye was a rollicky jollity—a showing of reckless revelry. A chap brought over from the genuine Abbaye jigged wildly; a Spanish troupe of dancers sensually; a plenty of ballads was run in; a brief burlesque of "Three Weeks" was given; a row of girls played tunes on bells hidden in their clothes; and through it all a detective, hired by the parents, was searching for the runaway girls from school. Before I forget it, the libretto was by Harry B. Smith and the score by Ludwig Englander. They sent the company for the last act to a Vienna dancing school, where a sharp change of aspect is gained by putting the girls into the plain, white and very short skirts of ballet pupils. An original effect is wrought by suspending with ribbons from the flies as many tambourines as there are girls, who thump tambos while so dancing in and out as to make a maypole sort of interlacing of the ribbons. The end is a view of a peach orchard, with full-blossomed trees, under which danced girls who, I suppose, are peaches.

I would hate to have to tell you the name of Fritzi Scheff's latest character. The play that Henry Blossom and Victor Herbert have put together for her is called "The Prima Donna." But whatever they may call the star part, believe me Fritzi Scheff plays Fritzi Scheff. It is a role in which she is often successful, and justly so; no one could play it so well. On the first night, one of the most fashionable audiences possible this side of grand opera cheered through its gurgles of admiration. She was the familiar, chic, alluring Fritzi; still the "little devil of grand opera," as the heavy Wagnerian prima donnas called her when she sprinkled gaiety all along the trail, from Mozart to Puccini. This time she bursts into a tawdry cafe chantant in a small French town. Some fourth-rate performers from Paris are rehearsing their specialties. One, a hollow-chested girl, coughs too much to sing; she would leave them in the lurch but that she is too poor to give up the pitiably small monetary reward. Up jumps Fritzi with the necessary money in her hand and the voice in her throat. That is the first view of the mysterious prima donna, resting from the whirl of Paris in a town where she is unknown. But we know her, so when the sprightly young lieutenant asks her if she can sing a song he has composed we ourselves are not a bit anxious. We loll back secure in the fact that we are about to hear a voice such as rarely trills through lighter operetta and a method much above it. But beyond that, we know, though we accept the pleasant fiction that the handsome young officer composed the song, that Victor Herbert really was father of it.

That is the feeling when we sit back to hear the chief number in "The Prima Donna." It is prepared for as obviously such; it is repeated, its motif runs through the opera. It is charming. In a few weeks we all will be singing it; or thinking we sing it, and enjoying the delusion just as much. It is simple; a slow, hesitating, imaginative waltz movement such as the famous aria in "Mlle. Modiste." Undescriptive praise is dull; but I must put in a word of admiration for the music of Herbert and not for this sample of it merely. But "The Prima Donna" is not only a matter of music. Blossom has supplied one scene of tense, cumulative, mounting drama.

Continued on Page 13.

MISS SIEGEL,
In "A Deal on 'Change" at the Orpheum.

WILLAR D MACK,
As Major Dale in "On P arole" at the Colonial.

WILLIE DUNLAY.
In "The Honeymooners" at the Salt Lake Theatre.

Scene from "Ben-Hur" at Salt Lake Theatre—Simonides and Sanbal lat confer about the young prince.